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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 003711

SIPDIS

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PARIS FOR WALLER, LONDON FOR TSOU, AMMAN FOR KANESHIRO,
ALGIERS FOR CHEYNE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/30/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: TFLE01: SYRIA DAILY SITREP 12 FOR SUNDAY, JULY
30, 2006

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 b/d

1. (C) Summary: An Israeli missile strike on July 29 destroyed the road serving a main Lebanese border crossing between Damascus and Beirut about five miles west of the official Syrian border crossing, effectively closing the crossing, according to contacts and press reports. Several hundred people, protesting the Israeli airstrike in Qana, Lebanon demonstrated in front of Damascus offices of the UN July 30. No injuries were reported. Egyptian FM Ahmed Aboul Gheit was expected to visit Damascus on July 30 to meet with a number of senior Syrian officials, according to press reports. The official Syrian press has rejected the notion of deploying a multilateral force in southern Lebanon, as well as placing an international force on the Syria-Lebanon border. During Friday prayers, preachers called for resistance to U.S. and Israeli plans for the region, according to news reports. The Charge raised the issue of Embassy security July 30 in a meeting at the MFA. The Consular Section received 148 walk-in requests for American Citizen Services (ACS) on July 27, up slightly from the previous day. Syrian Pepsi officials are seeking to lower the profile of their products in Syria, given the rise of anti-American sentiment here over the past two weeks, according to the company's local representative. End Summary.

POLITICAL/SECURITY

2. (C) The following are political updates:

-- An Israeli missile strike late July 29 destroyed the road serving the important Masna-Jdeidah border crossing between Damascus and Beirut, about a quarter-of-a-mile into the Lebanese side of the no-man's land, in a deep rocky pass, according to press reports and contacts. The area where the strike occurred was about five miles from the official Syrian border crossing, according to contacts. Police sealed off the area, and the road between the Syrian and Lebanese checkpoints has been closed in both directions, according to news reports.

-- Egyptian FM Ahmad Aboul Gheit was expected to visit Damascus on July 30 to meet with a number of senior Syrian officials, according to press reports. There was no immediate confirmation of the visit or the FM's meeting schedule.

-- Syria's Information Minister Mohsen Bilal rejected over the weekend the deployment of international forces at the Syria-Lebanon border, saying that the Syrians and Lebanese

are "one family" and will not allow anyone to separate them, according to a report by the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). The minister stressed Syrian support for Palestinian and Lebanese "resistance," adding "Syria offers all possible aid to the Lebanese people to overcome the horrible results of the Israeli aggression on Lebanon."

-- The SARG criticized over the weekend calls for the deployment of a multinational force in southern Lebanon as an "occupation force" that would do Israel's bidding. An editorial in Syria's official Tishreen newspaper said, "The international force proposed by Condoleezza Rice...will occupy southern Lebanon and it, instead of Israel, will be charged with eradicating the Lebanese national resistance."

-- In their sermons on Friday, July 28, preachers called for resisting U.S. and Israel plans for the region, stressing the need to support the Lebanese "resistance," (code language used in official and semi-official discourse here to refer to Hizballah), which was defending the nation's honor and dignity. The preachers urged citizens to make donations in cash and kind for displaced Lebanese, particularly those in Syria.

-- Charge July 30 raised once again with MFA designated interlocutor, Chief of Protocol, the issue of the removal of the uniformed police officers from the perimeter of the Chancery, noting that popular anger in the wake of the Israeli air strike in Qana, Lebanon could lead to demonstrations in Damascus, and that such demonstrators might wish to approach the US Embassy. While the uniformed police officers were largely a symbolic presence, it was important for the SARG to convey through their return its commitment to

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the security of the US Embassy. The Chief of Protocol seemed surprised that the uniformed police had not returned following last week's conversation on the subject, since he said he had raised the issue with the Ministry of the Interior. He undertook to call the Ministry immediately to have the officers returned, and claimed to understand the need for their presence at a moment of rising tensions.

-- Charge also reviewed the situation that has arisen regarding visa issuance for new A/DATT, Maj. Brett Seiling. Protocol chief took full responsibility for this problem, stating that he had inadvertently included Maj. Seiling's name in a list of pending visa requests that the Syrian Embassy in Washington was cleared to issue. In fact, he noted, he has no authority regarding visa issuance for military attaches; these decisions are made at the Presidential Palace. He insisted that there was no political message here, that it was an error and it will be corrected, although he was unable to state with any certainty how long it will take to do so.

13. (S) The DAO reports that there are initial signs of further defensive deployment by Syrian artillery northeast of Damascus, indicating another racheting up of the alert level of Syrian troops.

CONSULAR

14. (U) The following are consular updates:

-- The Consular Section received 148 walk-in requests for ACS services on July 27, up slightly from 145 inquiries the previous day.

-- The call volume related to the Israel-Hizballah conflict remained down on July 27 and throughout the July 28-29 weekend.

ECONOMIC

15. (C) The following are economic updates:

-- Syrian Pepsi officials are seeking to lower the profile of their products in Syria, given the rise of anti-American sentiment here over the past two weeks, according to the company's local representative. Some vendors have reported the vandalism of stand-alone refrigerators with the Pepsi logo, the representative said.

-- There are reports of the first power outages, which occurred twice a day for two hours each in the Syrian countryside, as a result of electricity being sent to Lebanon, according to contacts.

-- Pick-up trucks and generators from the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society arrived July 28 in Damascus to assist persons displaced by the Israel-Hizballah conflict, according to regional media. The four pick-ups were to assist the Syrians in transporting aid to displaced persons in Syria, while the generators will be sent to Lebanon, according to news reports. Kuwait had previously sent four shipments of food and medicine to Lebanon, with assistance from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and a Kuwaiti plane with 10 tons of medicine destined for Lebanon was expected to arrive June 30 in Damascus, according to media reports.

-- Nine planes loaded with humanitarian aid from Arab nations landed in Lattakia airport over the weekend, according to business contacts.

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